

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Missouri/Marias/Teton Rivers Turkey Augmentation (Chouteau and Teton Counties)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement to Proceed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background

FWP is asking the Commission to endorse a wild Merriam's turkey augmentation effort in the Fort Benton and Loma area. Birds trapped in northwestern Nebraska (or Montana if available) would be relocated to riparian habitats along the Missouri, and lower Marias and Teton Rivers. Birds would augment an existing struggling population. The goal is to boost the population and fill available habitats. With increasing landowner and general public interest for turkey transplants, in 2007 the National Wild Turkey Federation and FWP toured FWP Regions 4 and 6 analyzing wild turkey habitats. New releases filled EA's in the Bears Paw Mountains and the Missouri River near Cascade in 2008-09, with augmentations along the Missouri/Marias/Teton Rivers discussed since. The Commission endorsed this project in January 2012; however, excess birds haven't been available in Montana in 2012 and 2013. FWP is looking to partner with Nebraska Game & Parks Commission to receive Merriam's turkeys from the Pine Ridge and Niobrara River area of northwestern Nebraska. Should birds become available in Montana, those birds will be a priority for trapping efforts. FWP is looking to move 100-200 birds over the next two winters to the project area.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP had numerous conversations and meetings with area landowners and sportspeople in the project area. The meeting held June 10, 2014 in Fort Benton had 14 landowners and eight sportspeople present and in full support. Ten additional landowners contacted in the project area prior to the meeting also offered full endorsement of the proposal. Complete consensus was reached among participating landowners to allow turkey augmentations and turkey hunting on their properties should populations become established. Local, state and regional NWTF and Safari Club International representatives also offer full support. The NGPC director endorsed the proposal to move birds to Montana over the next two winters.

Alternatives and Analysis

PROPOSED ACTION: FWP to receive wild Merriam's turkeys from Nebraska (or Montana if available) for transplant to the Missouri and lower Marias and Teton Rivers near Fort Benton and Loma. NGPC would trap birds in Nebraska over the next two winters. FWP, SCI, NWTF and landowners would travel to trapping locations and release birds at sites identified by FWP in conjunction with the landowners. NWTF and SCI will provide funding and enclosed trailer and boxes for movement of birds to release sites.

NO ACTION: FWP wouldn't partner with NGPC. Turkey populations in the area wouldn't receive the needed augmentation boost to provide future hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends an endorsement to proceed from the Commission.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission endorse augmentation of the wild turkey population in the Missouri, lower Marias and Teton rivers with turkeys from Nebraska or Montana.